

CITY OF BELMONT

PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION MINUTES

THURSDAY, JULY 1, 2008, 7:00 PM

Chair Parsons called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at One Twin Pines Lane, City Hall Council Chambers.

1. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Parsons, Horton, Mercer, Mayer, McKenzie, Reed, Frautschi
Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Community Development Director de Melo (CDD), Senior Planner DiDonato (SP), Associate Planner Walker, (AP), City Attorney Zafferano (CA), Business Analyst Voelker (BA), Acting Recording Secretary Tompkins (ARST)

2. AGENDA AMENDMENTS – With the consent of the Commission, Items 5B and 5C were moved to be heard following Old Business Items 6A and 6B.

3. COMMUNITY FORUM (Public Comments) - None

4. CONSENT CALENDAR

4A. Minutes of June 5, 2008

MOTION: By Vice Chair Horton, seconded by Commissioner Mayer, to accept the Minutes of June 5, 2008, as presented.

Ayes: Horton, Mayer, Mercer, McKenzie, Frautschi, Reed, Parsons
Noes: None

Motion passed 7/0

5. STUDY SESSION:

5A. Economic Development Target Site Signage

BA Voelker, representing the Finance Department, summarized the staff memorandum and drafts of four signs and a map of the three sites targeted for economic development. Two of the signs will be placed at Firehouse Square, one at the corner of Ralston and Old County Road for Belmont Station and one on Ralston for the Village Center.

Commissioner Reed questioned why businesses are named on two of the signs. BA Voelker stated that the signs are concept signs and intended to be generic.

Discussion ensued regarding labeling of the signs and their correlation to the target sites.

Responding to Vice Chair Horton, CDD de Melo stated that the signs are intended for the general public – prospective developers as well as neighbors. Vice Chair Horton suggested that, for ease in searching, the website shown on the signs should include the link to the economic development program rather than just "Belmont.gov."

Chair Parsons made the following comments:

- The sign that is intended for the old pink building site is looking east down Masonic but looks like it is going down Old County Road.
- The Village Center sign that is looking back towards City Hall does not bear any resemblance to what the view will look like on Ralston, and suggested that they try to place it in the City right-of-way in front of Safeway. He felt it would totally confuse people if placed on the former Emmett House site.
- Before construction starts on the corner of O'Neill and El Camino, he suggested that they put the sign on the edge of the property so that the public will see something happening relative to the sign.

Commissioner Mercer asked if staff had considered using the space on the back of the signs, perhaps with a City diagram plan of the overall redevelopment areas with a "you are here" designation. CDD de Melo felt that if the backs are used it should be the same message on both sides, or perhaps there could be some language on the sign that describes the vantage point.

Commissioner Mayer felt that the Firehouse Square concept is difficult to understand, and suggested that it would be useful on the overlay of Sign 4 to name the streets so that people could visualize where the surrounding street lines are located, particularly O'Neill and El Camino.

Commissioner McKenzie felt that the sign is meaningless without the boundaries of the involved site, and suggested that they consider a split screen sign – one half with the concept drawing, the other half facing the public with an outline of the boundary area.

Commissioner Mayer felt that the good thing about the signs is that they are exciting and will give people something entirely different from what is there.

CDD de Melo concurred with Vice Chair Horton that one of the signs for Firehouse Square would be good double sided.

For marketing purposes, Chair Parsons suggested, and Commissioner Reed concurred, that the perspective of the building that will be on the corner of O'Neill and El Camino Real could be put on the fence at the corner.

Commissioners McKenzie and Mercer liked the idea of a split screen, either one above the other or side by side, and Chair Parsons added that they do not want signs that will confuse people; the Firehouse Square versions are the best, especially if they add street signs to the plan version.

6. OLD BUSINESS

6A. Final Landscape Plan Review – 1007 Muir Way

SP DiDonato summarized the staff memorandum, recommending approval of the landscape/irrigation plan as proposed.

Commissioner Reed asked if thought had been given to putting any kind of screening along the sides. SP DiDonato deferred the question to the applicant, noting that they had been more concerned about removing the hardscape when it came through the first time. Commissioner Mercer's question about the irrigation system was also deferred to the applicant.

Naji Rjaile, applicant and resident of Shearborne Drive, stated that they are open to anything the Commission recommends along the side, that there is an existing, working sprinkler system in the front and they will be using a small mobile irrigation system for the new grass in the rear.

Commissioner Mercer made the following comments:

- Appreciated the spirit that the applicant has put into this, but clarified that when the Planning Commission requested that hardscape be removed on the side yards they did not necessarily mean it had to be replaced with something growing; the idea was that it be permeable. Did not believe it was realistic to expect that they could keep grass growing in the side yards and suggested bark, gravel or stepping stones with a little ground cover.
- Was concerned that the Redwood tree proposed in the small space between the driveway and the neighbor's driveway might eventually cause a problem and suggested that they look at a row of columnar trees that have a root system that goes down such as Poplar or Italian Cypress.

- The trees proposed around the perimeter of the yard are lovely but the irrigation system will conflict with the amount of water needed for the grass growing across the trees to the edge of the yard. Suggested that they consider reducing the lawn area to the middle and curbing it in with a brick or board line and putting mulch on the actual roots of the trees.

Commissioner Frautschi concurred with Commissioner Mercer, adding that they might want to consider using pots for the various citrus trees to be placed in the front yard, along the right side of the house, as it is easier to control the water. He felt that if they planted the Redwood tree next to the driveway it would have to be replaced within ten years, and suggested they consider a Chinese Pistachio as an alternate.

MOTION: By Commissioner Mercer, seconded by Commissioner Frautschi, adopting the Resolution approving the Final Landscape/Irrigation Plan for 1007 Muir Way (Appl. No. 2006-0098) with the added condition that the applicant work with staff to substitute other permeable materials for the grass on the side yard and to substitute a more appropriate tree on the driveway side.

Ayes: Mercer, Frautschi, Mayer, McKenzie, Reed, Horton, Parsons
Noes: None

Motion passed 7/0

Chair Parsons stated that this decision can be appealed to the City Council within 10 calendar days.

6B. Final Landscape Plan Review – 1519 Ralston Avenue
AP Walker summarized the staff memorandum, recommending approval of the proposed Landscape Plan.

Commissioner Frautschi questioned a note on the plans regarding roof downspouts. Planning staff will check the building set of plans to determine if there are notes from Public Works, and to assure that they are consistent with the MPDES requirements.

JoAnn Gann, designer for the project, stated that the side yard is currently gravel because it is used to access the back yard and that is where the equipment will be brought in. Responding to Commissioner Mercer, she added that the front lawn is not lawn all the way under the trees, and that they have a sprinkler system for the lawn.

Commissioner McKenzie stated that, as far as he could see, the applicant did what the Commission had requested.

Commissioner Frautschi asked that photographs be taken of the current landscaping for the permanent file.

Commissioners Mercer and Mayer had no comment as they were absent from the meeting at which this project was approved.

Chair Parsons requested the addition of a condition that the landscaping on the left side of the driveway be upgraded once the project is completed, details to be worked out with staff. He added the suggestion that a tree be added since this is in the City's scenic corridor.

MOTION: By Commissioner McKenzie, seconded by Commissioner Frautschi, adopting the Resolution approving a Final Landscape Plan for 1519 Ralston Avenue (App. No. 2008-0005) with the added condition defined by the Chairman requiring the addition of a tree and upgraded landscaping by the driveway and before and after photographs.

Ayes: McKenzie, Frautschi, Reed, Horton, Parsons
Noes: None
Abstain: Mayer, Mercer

Motion passed 5/0/2

5. STUDY SESSION (CONTINUED):

5B. Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration – Carlmont Drive Townhomes

SP DiDonato summarized the staff memorandum, noting that the purpose of the Study Session is to answer questions and/or comments from the Planning Commission and that no comments had been received as yet from the public. Comments previously received from Commissioners were placed on the dais before the meeting. The comments related to roadway safety have not been responded to because more analysis is required and the project traffic engineer was not available to attend this meeting. He briefly discussed the feasibility of establishing a site/distance triangle for each of the driveway locations on the project site and answered questions from Commissioners.

Moshe Dinar, applicant/architect, thanked Commissioners for their time, noting that the project density has been reduced from 4 to 3 units and that they are willing to comply with any conditions imposed by the Commission. He discussed the driveway and parking situation, adding that the 15' setbacks required on two sides make it difficult to have one common driveway and that they could accept speed bumps or signage or any other traffic-controlling device.

Commissioner Mayer asked if they could swing Unit B around so that it would face more parallel to the upper edge of the triangle closer to the bend. Chair Parsons stated that that would worsen it – that they need to be on a straight, not a curve, and that they are at the safest place on the lot.

Commissioner Frautschi asked the applicant if, in order to save the trees in the middle, they had considered a common driveway in the center and putting the parking under the buildings. Mr. Dinar responded that they had considered that but that they would end up having to go to three stories, which would be very expensive and less attractive, and the cost per unit would be much higher. He added that it was the arborist's opinion that it wasn't worth the effort; they would not survive; he would prefer to see new trees located in areas where they would survive well.

Commissioner Frautschi asked if they had thought about the Commission's earlier suggestion that they consider a Planned Unit Development. Mr. Dinar stated that he presented it to the owner with no success; she is not going to sell the units but wants to keep them for rental income.

Chair Parsons ascertained that there was no one in the audience wishing to speak on this project.

Commissioners' comments were as follows:

Commissioner Mayer was pleased that they are proposing a low-density project in a high-density area and feels that the parking and traffic problems can be dealt with.

Commissioner Reed had no concerns other than the traffic safety issue.

Vice Chair Horton noted that it appears they are not hauling any dirt off of the site so there is very minimal cut and fill.

Commissioner Mercer's only reservation at this time was the traffic safety issue. She noted that on the previous Sunday she drove by the site and there was a full line of cars parked solid on both sides of the street for two blocks in both directions. She previously discussed a list of concerns with CDD de Melo. A copy of her concerns are on file.

Commissioner Mayer felt that they sometimes get too concerned about these issues and felt it was reasonable.

Commissioner Frautschi felt that the Negative Dec requires further exploration about parking availability. He pointed out that most of the driveways in that area do not feed onto Carlmont; they go into a feeder road so that they have clear sight and never have to back out. He believed it is a strong document and could support it.

Commissioner McKenzie did not like the idea of a one-car garage and felt it was important that the garages

be able to accommodate two cars. He felt that the City has the resources and know-how to deal with the traffic and parking issues to make this project work.

Chair Parsons felt that the parking and circulation issues need to be studied further because there is never enough parking for the adjacent convalescent hospital and it could spill over to the Carlmont Shopping Center parking lots. He did not believe that the design of the project was very imaginative, suggesting that unit B would be better on the site if turned sideways.

5C. Discussion of Residential Parking Requirements/Standards

CDD de Melo summarized the staff memorandum, asking for Commission feedback and questions. He thanked Commissioner Frautschi for his written comments on the subject.

Commissioners' concerns and comments regarding the parking requirements were as follows:

Chair Parsons:

- Cars parked on lawns.
- Parking requirements for a multi-family development.
- In certain parts of town where it's a safety issue, there should be some way to turn a car around, such as circular driveways or hammerheads, specifically on main thoroughfare type streets.
- Need some control over the proportion of the amount of hardscape in the front of a house. Need some kind of ratio that keeps Belmont green.
- Parking on a public right-of-way needs to be clarified. He would be generous when possible to allow for parking on the narrow streets where they can, but it needs to be understood that it is not private parking space.

Vice Chair Horton:

- Problems with lot sizes and geologic configurations of lots. Applicants are not provided the ability to do the best thing they can on a lot because of the code. I.e., if an applicant wants to add a certain number of square feet or another bedroom on a narrow lot they're required to put in a two-car garage which wipes out the entire front of their house. She was not sure that it is inappropriate to allow tandem parking of a certain lot widths or lengths.
- She questioned why detached garages are not allowed that are over 15' and in front of the house. Could cut back on grading, especially on up-hill sites, and if they were allowed to a height that is equal to the height of the house they could put a second unit over a garage.

Commissioner Mercer:

- Parking on paved front yards becomes an enforcement issue.
- For detached garages, suggested factoring in some kind of height-to-lot size ratio.
- Issue with people paving their easement and parking on it needs to be clarified. Confused around the whole City. Public Works is not in sync with development and codes are not enforced.

CA Zafferano interjected that an additional complexity is that the right-of-way is different on different streets, and not even necessarily the same on each side of the center of some streets.

Commissioner Mayer:

- Inconsistency in requirements, or lack of them, for addition of a secondary unit. CDD de Melo explained that provisions of State law AB 1866 come in to play when they amended the secondary unit standards.

Commissioner Reed:

- Not sure that the current four parking spots per home works very well. For a 5,000 sq.ft. lot, 14% is dedicated to parking just to meet the minimum standards. On a small lot, that is extra concrete on space that could be used creatively. When adding an in-law unit the need for parking is increased but the requirement stays the same. It makes more sense to him to say that a 4-bedroom house requires 4 parking spaces and a 5-bedroom house requires 5 parking spaces. One size fits all may be easier to administer but does not offer the flexibility to meet real world situations where people end up parking on the street a lot of the time.
- Since many garages are filled with "stuff" it may be unreasonable to assume that every mandated two-car garage that is mandated is filled with two vehicles. He suggested more flexibility to address these parking issues.

Commissioner Mercer:

- Concurred with Commissioner Reed, who offered a different way of looking at it and possibly arriving at the same standard for 90% of the dwellings and having the flexibility for that odd 10% by looking at the number of bedrooms. Suggested that they need try to find some other index to use – it could be lot size, bedrooms, or square feet of the house – to determine how many parking spaces are needed vs. an automatic two and two.

Discussion ensued regarding Section 8.2.5, which regulates storage in a garage. CDD de Melo concurred that the language could be tightened up. He also pointed out that the Belmont Answer Book is on line and discusses these types of regulations.

Commissioner Mercer brought up the subject of commercial parking. CDD de Melo responded that the downtown plan amendments will look at the total picture from architecture to parking to in-lieu fees, and will be unveiled to start on July 29th.

Commissioner Frautschi:

- Perhaps more important than the code changes is code enforcement. If we have the rules but not the will to enforce them then the rules are no good.
- All secondary units need to be found and legalized since they impact street parking.
- Parking zones that would require a permit to park on the street would generate funds or get people to clean out their garage if they have to pay to park.
- Need to look at certain narrow, winding streets and make parking mandatory just on one side. Fire trucks find it difficult or impossible to get down some of the streets, and it would force people to start parking in their driveways and garages.
- He does not like the idea of tandem parking but would be willing to do anything if people would use the parking space.
- Police should enforce State law to require parking in the direction of traffic. Parking in both directions causes visual clutter and makes it difficult to walk on certain streets.

Vice Chair Horton noted that the fire hazard is a big concern. Chair Parsons concurred, and felt that Council should be looking at that right now due to the dryness of the area. He suggested that the Fire Department take the lead in re-establishing parking on only one side of some of the narrow, winding streets.

CDD de Melo asked for any written comments Commissioners have on Section 8, which he will assemble with the issues just discussed. He informed the Commission that Council will be receiving an update on the recent efforts of the Administrative Code Enforcement Team at its July 22nd meeting, and will be asked policy and resource questions about addressing code enforcement activity.

7. REPORTS, STUDIES AND UPDATES

CDD de Melo reported as follows:

7A. Motel 6 – 1101 Shoreway Road

There has been some feedback from the Police Department on recent activity; he will keep the Commission posted on that.

7B. NDNU (Koret) Athletic Field

The Acoustic Study has been released but there will probably not be a Task Force meeting until August due to NDNU summer vacation. If Commissioners have questions or comments they could send them to him but he expects to get Task Force input before it will be discussed by the Commission.

7C. Charles Armstrong School – 1405 Solana Drive

Neighborhood meeting is scheduled for August 5th at City Hall with members of Neighborhoods First, Charles Armstrong and City staff to reintroduce discussion of short- and long-term operational questions of the school as well as McDougal Park. There will be a larger meeting in the future that will include Parks and Rec Commissioners but Charles Armstrong has asked staff to keep it at a lower member level first.

7D. Ralston/US-101 Landscape Project

Met with the landscape architects the previous Friday, and they will be taking the final plan to CalTrans for approval within two weeks, after which he will bring it to the Commission.

Commissioner Mercer mentioned that the attempt to burn down the weeds at the site did not do a good enough job and there is a serious weed abatement problem along the west side on and off ramps that needs to be mowed down. Grass fires are started with car emissions and it would look a lot better.

7E. Potential Joint City Council Study Session – AT&T Light Speed Project – August 2008

CA Zafferano explained that Light Speed is an additional service that in AT&T's view is essentially an upgrade to video service that would be a substitute for cable or satellite television service and will require the installation of utility boxes in the City right-of-way. Staff has been working on the project with AT&T for approximately two years. The Study Session will consist of a presentation by AT&T and a staff analysis of all of the various issues associated with the placement of the boxes. As a result of State legislation, cities are required to allow the installation of the boxes and have only limited review over where and under what circumstances they are placed. The boxes are approximately the size of a small refrigerator, will be above ground and will not be in everybody's yard. Issues regarding screening, graffiti, etc., will be discussed in the report.

Chair Parsons called attention to the fact that all of the trees around the railroad station are dying. He asked why either the City Manager or Mayor is not writing letters requiring that they either be replaced or healed. Commissioner Frautschi mentioned that he knows there was a letter of commitment three years ago from CalTrain that if the trees didn't improve they would take them out and replace them and take care of it. He pointed out that the trees were planted at the same time that they planted the ones in San Carlos, and theirs are four times the size and they're alive.

Vice Chair Horton commented that the former Emmett House site looks significantly better. CDD de Melo added that the new site has mulch and tree protection and that the contractor was scheduled to be back to potentially start work on connecting the foundation the week of July 7th. The Council agenda for the following week includes disposition of the two units, rental or for sale, and once the Council takes action on that he expects to be getting the subcommittee together with staff and the architect.

Commissioner Frautschi mentioned that the magnolia trees on Ralston at Barrett desperately need water.

Commissioners McKenzie and Mayer indicated that they both will be out of town from July 7th to the 24th and will miss the next two meetings.

8. CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF TUESDAY, JULY 8, 2008

Liaison: Commissioner McKenzie

Alternate Liaison: Commissioner Mercer

Commissioner Mercer indicated that she will attend this meeting in Commissioner McKenzie's absence.

9. ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m. to a Regular Planning Commission Meeting on Tuesday, July 15, 2008, at 7:00 p.m. in Belmont City Hall.

Carlos de Melo
Planning Commission Secretary

CD's of Planning Commission Meetings are available in the
Community Development Department.

Please call (650) 595-7417 to schedule an appointment.